The Seven Most Influential Communist Leaders of All Time

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A station in the Berlin U-bahn named for Karl Marx. Photo credit: LOCUBROTUS / Shutterstock.com.

While the popularity of communism has waned in recent years, it was once one of the most popular political ideologies in the world, and reached its peak in the 20th century. There are several figures in history who championed the spread of communism, and were revered both in their respective countries as well as internationally.

7. Karl Marx

Karl Marx was arguably the world's most influential communist leader of all time. Karl Marx was also a renowned philosopher, sociologist, and economist is often termed as one of the most influential figures in human history. Karl Marx was born on May 5th, 1818 in the Kingdom of Prussia in the modern-day Lower Rhine region where he spent most of his childhood. The young Marx would later move to Cologne where he wrote a controversial paper entitled Rheinische Zeitung which was soon banned by the government of Prussia. Karl Marx is perhaps best known for being the founder of Marxism, an ideological movement whose doctrines are practiced by governments around the world and became instrumental in the establishment of 20th-century communists states such as Cuba, the USSR, and China. Karl Marx died on March 12th, 1883 in London, England and was buried at the Highgate Cemetery.

6. Vladimir Lenin

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was a 20th-century politician who served in several paramount positions in Russia including as head of the government between 1917 and 1924. Vladimir Lenin was among the most important communist leaders in Russian history. Lenin was born on March 22nd, 1870 in Simbirsk, Russia to a relatively wealthy family who were liberal conservatives. Lenin's father died in 1886 while his brother was executed in 1887, events which forever altered Lenin's political and spiritual beliefs, and which propelled him to begin practicing revolutionary socialism. Lenin would begin his long political career in 1893 after he moved to Saint Petersburg and joined the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party as a senior figure. Lenin ascended to the leadership of the country after his party overthrew the government in 1917 during the October Revolution and soon established a communist-socialist government. Lenin's socialist ideologies were extremely popular among Russian citizens who caused Vladimir Lenin to have a cult-like following in Russia (which displeased him greatly). The socialist government that Lenin established in the early 20th century was the basis of the subsequent governments which governed the republic for about seven decades. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin died on January 21st, 1924 in Gorki, aged 53 years.

5. Joseph Stalin

Joseph Stalin was a 20th century Russian political and revolutionary leader and was the face of the Soviet Union during the Second World War as well as the Cold

War. Joseph Stalin became an instrumental figure in the socialist movement around the world in the 20th century. Joseph Stalin was born on December 18th, 1878 in a small town of Gori in the then Russian Empire to a low-income family. The young Stalin would later join the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party where he was engaged in several activities including editing the party's publication, Pravda, and conducting kidnappings and robberies to finance the party's engagements. Joseph Stalin would gain an influential position after the Lenin-led party ascended to leadership in 1917. During Lenin's reign as leader, Stalin gained a cult-like following among the Russian public and succeeded Lenin as leader of the Soviet Union after Lenin's death in 1924. In his governance, Stalin was inspired by the ideologies of both Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin and merged to two to form the Stalinism ideology, a form of socialism that he championed. Joseph Stalin died on March 5th, 1953 and was mourned by other communist leaders including China's Mao Zedong whose government instituted a period of national mourning in Stalin's honor.

4. Mao Zedong

Mao Zedong was a 20th century Chinese revolutionary leader, communist leader, and founder of the People's Republic of China. Mao was one of the central figures of communism in Asia and was the founder of the Communist Party of China. Mao Zedong was born on December 26th, 1893 in Shaoshan in the Imperial China, and embraced the anti-imperialist movement that was taking shape in his youth, particularly after the 1911 Xinhai Revolution. Mao was inspired by other communist leaders such as Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, and adopted the Marxism-Leninism ideologies. Mao founded the Communist Party of China while working at the Peking University. In 1949, Mao led communist forces who deposed the imperial government and established the one-party state known as the People's Republic of China. Mao Zedong died on September 9th, 1976 in Beijing.

3. Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh was a 20th century communist leader in Vietnam, and was the most influential politician in the country's history. Minh was born on May 19th, 1890 in Hoang Tru, a small Vietnamese village, and was then named Nguyen Sinh Cung. Minh had the privilege of visiting several countries including the United States, France, and the United Kingdom as a young adult. Ho Chi Minh embraced communist ideologies of Marxism-Leninism while on his brief stay in Moscow in 1923. Minh was instrumental in the Vietnam's struggle for independence and

became North Vietnam's first president. Ho Chi Minh died on September 2nd, 1969 in Hanoi. Minh was revered all over the world as a revolutionist, and became an inspiration for other revolutionary struggles in Asia and Africa.

2. Kim Il-sung

Kim Il-Sung was a revolutionary leader of North Korea who served as the country's head of state and government between 1948 and 1994. As the founding father of the communist republic of North Korea, Kim Il-Sung became the most influential leader in the country's history with many North Koreans seeing the leader as a demigod. Kim Il-Sung was born on April 12th, 1912 in Mangyongdae, and was exposed to the oppression North Koreans faced when the country was under Japanese occupation. Kim joined the Mao-led Communist Party of China in 1931 and became involved in anti-Japanese guerilla warfare. Kim would later immigrate to the Soviet Republic in 1945 where he was appointed as a major of the Red Army. After the Soviet Army deposed Japanese occupation in Korea, Kim Il-Sung was appointed as the leader of North Korea. Kim Il-Sung ruled over North Korea for about 45 years until his death in 1994.

1. Fidel Castro

Fidel Castro was the political and revolutionary leader in Cuba who rose to fame after overthrowing the oppressive regime of Fulgencio Batista in 1959 and established a communist government in the country. Fidel Castro was one of the longest serving heads of state in the world after being in the helm of Cuba's government between 1959 and 2008 as prime minister and later as president. Fidel Castro was admired by millions of people around the world for his communist-led government which championed anti-imperialism movements.

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